

COMBATTING IMPOSTER SYNDROME THROUGH GAMES

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Abstract

According to Sabrina Farmer, Google site's reliability manager, "imposter syndrome was first applied to highly accomplished women who nonetheless felt as though they achieved their success through luck or fraud (Gold, Gmail engineer: Women must overcome the impostor syndrome)." Among women in the technology field, imposter syndrome has been one of the most common hindrances towards success. This idea was echoed even more in Reshma Saujani's, the founder of Girl's Who Code, TED talk titled "Teach Girls Bravery, Not Perfection." In this TED talk, she talked about how girls were raised to be perfect, do something they know they are great at, and play it safe, while boys are taught to take risks and aim high (Saujani Reshma, Teach Girls Bravery, Not Perfection). This feeling of having to be perfect rather than brave is where imposter syndrome stems from.

In Jane McGonagal's novel, "Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World," she talks about game researcher Nicole Lazzaro's work on why gamers love to fail. In a psychology research study in the M.I.N.D. Lab in Helsinki Finland, researchers confirmed that when we are playing a well-designed game, failure does not disappoint us. Instead, the player feels happy, excited, interested, and optimistic because a game is a system that allows for positive failure feedback where players feel a sense of control in a goal oriented environment and have the drive to succeed. As a result, games have successfully created a space where people feel safe to fail and as a result learn from those failures (McGonagal, 64 - 76).

Ian Bogost, the Founding Partner at Persuasive Games and Professor of Interactive Computing at the Georgia Institute of Technology, sets up the conversations for how video games can be used for education in his paper, "The Rhetoric of Video Games." In his paper,

Bogost sets up the conversation for the use of games in education by stating that the procedural rhetoric in games are explaining different models to show how different systems work through systems thinking, feedback, simulation, and engagement (Bogost 125-128). With learning about how games can create a safe and positive environment for failure and how they can be utilized as a teaching tool, I decided to create a game with the goal of combatting imposter syndrome.

Last semester, I made a web based conversation game called “My Agony” where you play as a woman looking to apply to be CEO of a technology company. However, she is constantly affronted by a co-worker who keeps discouraging her. The goal of the game is to respond with confidence to what the man was saying. As the player responds confidently to the comments, they will gain confidence points, which results in other co-workers cheering her on. The more confidence points the player accumulates, the better the ending would be. When she does not respond with confidence, the game ends and gives you a fact about women in the technology industry. The conversation the player experiences in the simulator is meant to model common rhetoric women face from men in the industry. After testing the game on majority female peers, I saw that the game did boost their confidence and thus helped combat imposter syndrome.

Work Cited

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